

hearing us all this while. Did you see the look he cast our way just now?"

"What signifies? I have said nothing that I would not just as lief say in Powles or from the standard in Chepe."

Whether he had heard them or not, the old man, who had all the appearance of a wealthy merchant, took no notice of this remark, but summoned the drawer, and, having discharged his moderate reckoning, quietly left the room. In passing them, however, he gave them a brief but searching glance, which made the soldier's wrath blaze up in an instant. He dashed down his cup, and swore lustily that he would crop the merchant's ear for him—a threat he was likely enough to have executed, if Francis had not interfered. It was not that the latter had in general the slightest objection to these tavern brawls, but there was something in the mild, sympathizing glance of the stranger, that for a moment called into action the better feelings, which, though they had long lain dormant in him, had never been totally extinct. Neither was the soldier's wrath a very enduring kind; laughing at himself, he returned the half-drawn sword to its sheath, and applied himself once more to the wine cup. But even this occupation, it seemed, had lost its relish, for he set it down again with a grimace, as if it had been physic.

"It's a queer thing," he said, "but drink as I will, I can't comfortably get drunk like other people. And yet I have been soaking till sack and sherries have no longer any taste in my mouth more than so much water."

"Why, then, since no one appears likely to visit the Golden Hawk to-night, suppose we hunt abroad for something to amuse us. If we can find no jolly fellows like ourselves, who are willing to exchange a few blows with us in the way of love and good fellowship, we must e'en content ourselves with drubbing the watchmen, or being drubbed by them—it does not matter which."

"Not a fico, lad; not a whit, not a jot, so as we have a row of some kind."

And forthwith the boon companions sallied forth into the night.

At the time of our narrative—our true narrative, be it remembered—the streets of London were lighted in a way that was only calculated to show the darkness, and to dispel so much of it as might better enable the thieves and the disorderly of all sorts to carry on their separate vocations. The watchmen were, for the most part, selected, not from their fitness for the office, but because they were fit for nothing else; and, with their brown bills, and cressets instead of lanterns, they were anything but remarkable for maintaining order. The spirit of the age, too, was favorable to coarse indulgence; robbery itself, though a crime in the eye of the law, was far from being so severely condemned by public opinion, and he who felt disposed to play the midnight robber, either in the city or on the highways, might do so in exceedingly good company. In general, therefore, it was unnecessary to go far or wait long in search of adventures suited to the tastes of a roystering blade, as they then called the wild debauchee and Mohawk of a later period. Accordingly, they had not gone far beyond St. Paul's church-yard, when from one of the many small streets opening into the greater thoroughfare, like so many lesser blood vessels opening into a large artery, they heard the clash of swords, mingled with brutal oaths and cries for help. Such sounds were music to the ears of our two wild bloods, who instantly started off for the spot, as if by mutual consent,